

S U P P L E M E N T

TO THE

NONCONFORMIST.

VOL. XXVII.—NEW SERIES, NO. 1107.]

LONDON: WEDNESDAY, JAN. 23, 1867.

[GRATIS.]

THE WORKING CLASSES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS.

CONFERENCE AT THE LONDON COFFEE-HOUSE.

The Conference for inquiring into the causes why, to so large an extent, the skilled artisans of England hold aloof from the religious institutions of the country, was held at the London Coffee House, Ludgate-hill, on Monday afternoon. The persons present were for the most part residents in London, and had been convened by the circular already referred to in our columns. On one side of the chair were ranged the representatives of the working men of London, about sixty in number, who had been invited after careful inquiry with a view to embrace as much variety of opinion as possible, and on the other a number of clergymen, ministers, and laymen of various denominations. Among those present were the Dean of Westminster; Canon Miller, vicar of Greenwich; Canon Champneys; J. C. Mackenzie, M.A.; F. Denison Maurice, M.A.; Jas. Amos, A.M.; J. E. Kempe, M.A.; R. H. Killick, M.A.; J. Oakley, Secretary of the London Diocesan Board; R. Gregory, M.A.; R. Maguire, M.A.; Christopher Nevile; E. White; H. Solly; T. Binney; J. Stoughton; J. C. Harrison; Dr. Raleigh; Dr. Mullens; Newman Hall, LL.B.; J. Kennedy, M.A.; W. Roberts; Mark Wilks; W. Brock; A. Mackennal, B.A.; A. Hannay; J. H. Wilson; J. Pillans; R. D. Wilson; G. M. Murphy; W. Reed; — Penrose; R. Spears; S. Manning; J. Corbin; F. Tressell; C. Bailhache; Dr. Spence; Dr. Edmond; Dr. Burns; W. Tyler; the Hon. Arthur Kinnaird, M.P.; Thos. Hughes, Esq., M.P.; and Messrs. J. M. Ludlow, E. Miall, W. H. Watson, John Macgregor, E. Shipton, W. Edwards, H. R. Ellington, Edmond Beales, Henry Lee (of Manchester), Josias Alexander, C. E. Mudie, G. F. White, B. Harris Cowper, H. Spicer, jun., John Finch, and representatives of the London City Mission, Open-air Mission, Theatre Services, and other religious organisations of the metropolis. Among the working men present were Messrs. G. Potter, R. Applegarth, G. Odger, John Weston, — Le Lubez, T. Paterson, J. Bates, J. H. Cross, C. Johnson, W. Booker, C. Shaw, W. Glazier, W. Abbott, J. T. Dunning, C. Green, R. Hartwell, &c., &c.

Soon after two o'clock, on the motion of the Rev. CHRISTOPHER NEVILE, seconded by Mr. PATERSON, Edward Miall, Esq., was unanimously voted to the chair.

In opening the proceedings, the CHAIRMAN said: Gentlemen,—We meet here to-day in response to a circular invitation signed by thirty-six gentlemen, several of them of high repute, to consider a matter of deep interest and importance. It is assumed in that circular "that the large majority of skilled artisans in England are alienated from existing religious institutions, and indifferent to public worship in the Churches," and this Conference has been convened for the purpose of ascertaining how far such is really the case, and to what special causes it may be referred. It was thought by the promoters of this meeting that much valuable information, in regard to both the fact itself, and the causes which have led to it, might be elicited by a free and manly interchange of opinions between the two sections of the community chiefly concerned in this inquiry—the non-churchgoing section on the one hand, and the church-going section on the other; and it has been carefully and anxiously sought by the committee that each should be equally represented in the present Conference, which, it should be understood, has for convenience' sake, been constituted almost exclusively of members resident in the Metropolitan district.

In endeavouring to discharge the heavy responsibility which, by accepting the chair on this occasion, I am conscious of having incurred, I venture to ask your kind indulgence, and, what is of even more importance, your generous co-operation. On my part, I think I may best clear the ground for your subsequent proceedings, by marking off as distinctly as possible the principal object to be kept steadily in view, and the limits within which it will be desirable that discussion should be confined. This Conference, then, is not assembled to try the question whether Christianity be, or be not, a Divine revelation. Whencesoever it may have come, here it is in our midst, operating with more or less power, direct and indirect, to shape men's judgments, mould their characters, modify their aims, affect their circumstances. Here it is, organised in various institutions by means of which those who believe in it seek to imbue the population with its spirit. Alongside of this fact we find this other—that as a rule these organised institutions fail of attracting the regard, winning the confidence, engaging the affections, and securing the support, of the great body of what, by way of distinction, we call the working classes, skilled and unskilled. Now it is about those institutions in relation to those classes that we have come together to mutually exchange our views. What Christianity is to all classes alike, it is, of course, to the working men. The obstructions which it meets with from human nature in any and every class, it will meet with from them. These things, common to the whole body of the people, we may leave in abeyance. Our object is more limited. It is assumed that, proportionally speaking, existing institutions and ministrations the aim of which is to command Christianity to men's consciences and hearts, have succeeded less with working men than with other classes. Why with them less than with others? What are the special characteristics, whether of form in those institutions, or of spirit in those ministrations, which go to account for that want of success? Or what is there in the social position, habits, and pursuits, in the political convictions or *status*, or in the *esprit de corps*, of the class, as a class, which indisposes their minds to unite with other sections of the community in public worship? It is clear that some influences are at work which make their force felt upon working men in a higher degree than upon others, in deterring them from attendance upon the public means of religious worship and instruction. It is the primary purpose and scope of the present Conference, as I understand it, by the agency of free consultation, to learn what is the exact nature of those influences, and whence they derive their special power. We have come together, not so much to discuss differences, as to explain what they are, and how they come to exist—to make contributions to a common stock of information—to do away with, or at any rate lessen, misconceptions on both sides, if misconceptions there be—and, by helping one another to an accurate knowledge of facts, to put us all in a more hopeful position for seeing how we really stand towards one another, and how far it is possible to come closer together, in reference to matters that address themselves to our religious sympathies, feelings, and practice. If I have rightly described the object for which you have met, you will feel with me that it is hardly possible to overrate its importance. On the one hand, those members of the Conference who, believing the truth of what was taught by Jesus Christ, yearn to witness its hearty reception by others, cannot but be deeply concerned to know how far it may be owing to the forms in which they present it, to the methods they adopt in urging its claims, to the ungenial elements with which they associate it, to the inconsistency of life with which they dim its lustre, or to the inanimate, unloving, or repulsive spirit in which they exemplify its power over themselves, that so numerous a class of their fellow-countrymen persistently stand aloof from their Christian organisations, and decline to join them in the public worship of Almighty God. According to their view of the case, the truths underlying all really Christian doctrine, the relations in which it places man to God, the principles of morality it inculcates, and the hopes which it quickens and

nourishes in the human breast, are pre-eminently adapted to the very class which appears to esteem them most lightly, and are singularly fitted to raise it, to dignify it, to abate its anxieties and sufferings, to make it an irresistible moral power, to invest it with an atmosphere of joyousness, and to open to it boundless resources of present and future happiness. That the working class, as such, should miss what seems so well suited to their wants and aspirations, is a fact which those who know what Christianity can do for man must contemplate with deep searchings of heart. They cannot attribute the fact to any special inaptitude of the truth to win for itself the working men's sympathy and trust. Is it matter for surprise that they should wish to ascertain how far they are themselves responsible for this state of things? Is it not natural that they should call together as fair a representation as possible of the working class, and say to them, "Tell us frankly what it is in existing religious institutions, or in our temper and modes of working them, which keeps you at a distance from them?" Throw whatever light your experience and observation will enable you to throw upon the fact, if not for your own sakes, then for ours." The working men, I trust, will appreciate the motive and spirit of this appeal. But, on the other hand, this free intercommunication between habitual attendants and non-attendants upon Christian ordinances, as an attempt to establish at least a better understanding between them, is not less important to the well-being of the working men. Putting out of view altogether the loss which it is believed by others that they sustain, but which they themselves regard as, for the most part, imaginary, is it not worth consideration that any course of life which tends to contract the purest sympathies of our nature within the narrow limits of a class, is both intellectually and morally prejudicial to those who adopt it? For, it is certain, that man lives little or much according as the range of his sympathies is curtailed or expanded. Nothing truly noble is to be gained by unnecessarily multiplying the number, or heightening the intensity, of prejudices which fence men off from intelligent intercourse with any large portion of their fellow-men. We are all of us too prone to surrender ourselves to blind conventional habits, and any effort to release ourselves from the slavery they impose upon us is better than tame submission. At all events, in a matter which one way or the other is of immense importance, may it not be possible that some advantage may accrue from looking at other sides of a great question which perhaps has been approached from one side only? May it not be that there are hasty judgments, partial and sometimes erroneous information, crude opinions, class prejudices, and unreasonable demands, which more intimate knowledge of the whole case, and a more friendly interchange of sentiment upon it with those who differ, would go far to correct? Perhaps, the different sides of the subject when brought under one view will be found to result in conclusions much nearer the truth than any which have been visible from one position only. And working men, not more but not less than other men, are interested in seeing things as they really are, rather than as a strong pre-possession might fancy them to be. For, after all, truth is stronger than the human will, however resolute it may be, and love of truth, and fidelity to it, infinitely more worthy of being cherished than love of and fidelity to, class or party, denomination or church. The attendance of working men on this occasion, no doubt at considerable sacrifice of their secular affairs, offers good evidence of the lively interest they take in the object of this Conference. I venture to express my earnest trust that they will receive as well as impart benefit from mutual consultation with those between whom and themselves there is so wide a divergence of opinion and sentiment. Gentlemen, I hope I shall not be held guilty of impertinence in reminding you that this Conference can be of but little practical value unless its proceedings be characterised by perfect honesty of purpose and freedom of utterance. That, indeed, is the preliminary but indispensable condition on which you have met. Every one of you, it may be taken for granted, on accepting the invitation to be present, made up his mind to listen to many things which will occasion an unpleasant jar to his feelings—nevertheless, we all know how much easier it is to be tolerant in prospect than under excitement. Let no man, I beseech you, who may take part in this day's proceedings, be made to feel that he has convictions which he is compelled to suppress. Lay no man under a temptation to conceal any part of the information which he came hither with the intention

of putting before you. We are not come together as partisans—let not the tone of our intercommunion degenerate into partisanship. Ours is not a battle for victory, but a council for truth. We have all the same object in view, though perhaps all will approach it by different paths. Let the best and the worst freely come out—but let it come out in a timely and orderly manner. A better knowledge of one another is what we want, and whatever may contribute to it, even if painful, will, I cannot doubt, be patiently borne on all hands. It is not intended, I believe, to submit to you any resolution—no proposition will go to a vote—no member of the Conference, therefore, will be committed to anything beyond what he may individually express. I am sure, therefore, I shall correctly interpret the unanimous desire of this assembly when I say that so long as what is this day spoken in your presence be relevant to the purpose, perfect liberty will be assured to every speaker. But the most unrestrained freedom of utterance is quite compatible, it may be well to remember, with gentleness of spirit, with a considerate regard to the feelings of others, with a cautious abstinence from the imputation of unworthy motives, and with a generous, brotherly, charitable bearing. I am confident that they will best further the end of the Conference who “nothing extenuate” and who also “set down nought in malice.” Plain-speaking is not to be confounded with bitter speaking. If sometimes the surgeon must use the knife to lay bare the core of an ulcer, he will be careful at least not to turn the knife in the wound, nor inflict more pain than is inseparable from probing the unsound place. In one sentence, which I am convinced will carry undisputed authority to every man’s conscience, whatever may be his opinions of existing religious institutions and ministrations, let me point out to you the rule which we shall all do well to observe. “As, therefore, ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so likewise unto them.” Gentlemen, I hope that it will not be considered out of place if, concluding these introductory observations, I breathe forth my heart’s desire that the God and Father of us all will deign to bless our purpose in coming together, and to bring good out of it as He only can. And whatever may become of our several opinions, may our hearts draw more closely together, and our brotherhood make itself more sensibly felt! Where love lights the way to truth, even differences melt into harmony. That your proceedings this day may be a striking illustration of this great law of the spiritual world, is a prayer in which, I trust, we can all heartily unite.

Resolutions having been passed with reference to the order of proceedings, and the length of speeches—which it was decided should be restricted to ten minutes—

Mr. PATERSON, cabinet-maker, said he hoped that the present occasion might be one of those epochs in which a new agency, or possibly a new form of an old agency, might be introduced, towards elevating mankind and spreading Christianity. He wished to say a word on behalf of himself and other working men who might address the meeting. They were not accustomed to speak in a soft way. They sometimes blurted out a truth, not intentionally in an offensive manner, but it might appear in that light to more cultivated tastes. If he should say anything in that way, he begged the indulgence that a half-educated man required when brought in contact with men of more complete education. He fully agreed with the chairman that what theologians called the corruption of the human heart was common to all classes, and might therefore be put out of consideration at the present moment. Christianity came into the world, and they were told that it was gladly received by the common people. The common people were now very much the same as they were then. They were exposed to temptations to vice, and many of them were vicious and ignorant. If the people had not changed there must be something, either in religion itself, or in the way in which it was presented to them, that had changed, to give rise to the present extraordinary position of affairs, in which a religion that was formerly received by the common people and neglected by the richer classes was now rejected by the former and accepted by the latter. For his own part, he thought there were many reasons for it, but there were two or three that occurred to his mind as amongst the strongest. There was an organisation that assumed to itself, to a certain extent, a monopoly, but he did not think there was any monopoly intended. The gentlemen belonging to it were educated in a peculiar way, which, though it might give them power in one sense, tended to separate them from the feelings of the working classes, and confined them to a certain rut. At the present time men’s thoughts had turned into a new channel. They no longer studied literature or science in the same way as formerly; the great mass of men had turned their attention to the study of experimental science. Now, was this less really a worship of God, if it was devoutly done, than the direct worship carried on in churches and chapels? But what was the position of the great mass of teachers of the Christian religion? Why, they had separated themselves entirely from a scientific investigation of God’s work; they had almost put themselves in opposition to it. The gravest opposition to science came not from the actual truth, but from the conceptions which had been formed of it by intelligent men who had entirely separated themselves from the great truths that should have come from the Bible and illuminated their search. This was a most lamentable condition of things, and working men per-

ceived it. There were professors who were obliged to let religion alone, because the interpretation that was made of religion clashed with the facts which they were conscientiously obliged to expound. He did not believe that such persons had any wish to put down religion, but they found that certain facts existed, and that the Church held certain views and adopted certain interpretations of the Bible, and that those things clashed. The working man standing between the two said, “There is the scientific man, am I to believe him? Here is the clergyman, am I to believe him?” The natural dislike that man no doubt had to religious teaching and religious thought led him to accept the scientific teaching in preference to the religious. Then, again, there was a difficulty with regard to social matters. He did not wish to ignore the immense work that clergymen performed as dispensers of charity. He knew well that if a man was in misery and want he would go to the clergyman, and in all probability would be relieved, but that was not the whole work of a clergyman. The working men were engaged, at present, in a great struggle to better their condition. They might be mistaken in their proceedings, and their efforts might be fruitless, but the great religious bodies left the subject alone, thinking, as they appeared to do, that religion had nothing to do with social matters, and that the working men were to go on blundering, or to pursue a righteous struggle, without the slightest assistance or advice. (Hear, hear.) It was said that clergymen alone had to do with religion, but what was religion if it did not enter into everything that concerned a man’s life? Working men on both these questions felt that religious men had separated themselves from the rest of the world, and that religion had ceased to be a religion which he could mix up with his daily life, and upon which he could rest in his daily cares and disappointments. Another thing to which he would refer was the kind of organisation in which the Church was presented. He did not wish to advocate the cause of State-Church or Nonconformity. He would only say that there was a strong feeling among working men that the State-Church usurped a place which it ought not to hold; that it took the property which belonged to the whole nation and used it for the purposes of a particular class. (Hear, hear.) A step in the right direction had been taken in reference to the Universities, but a mere instalment like that could not remove the sense of injustice which had been felt for years. The richer classes had practically shut up the foundations laid in former years by generous men for education, and had excluded all who could not pronounce their Shibboleth. He did not wish to refer to the question of surplices, copeps, or organs, or even altar decorations; these were extremely secondary things as compared with the gigantic act of injustice committed, as they believed, against working men. Even supposing they were wrong in thinking as they did, did not Christianity call for some sacrifice? Did not Christianity ask men to adapt themselves in some measure to the errors of others? Did not Paul say that though he might consider it just he would not eat meat for his whole life if it should cause a brother to offend? The great Church Establishment had drawn to itself an immense amount of property belonging to the country, and absorbed it for the purposes of a class, it might not be a majority, but certainly it was to one class; and working men saw that the wealthier classes in this respect would not give up, in the slightest degree, any of their supposed rights. It might, perhaps, be asked, why did they not go to Dissenting chapels? The fact was, the same thing was manifest there. He wished to speak freely. A Dissenting chapel in nine cases out of ten was a religious shop. A certain number of men united in looking out for a man with a certain amount of speaking power. They got the man—or the man got them, it did not matter which—and then they formed a committee. A certain amount of money was subscribed, a chapel was built, and it was mapped out into as many compartments as it would hold; then there were certain rents paid, and there was a certain proprietorship about the matter; but if the working man went there to worship God he had to sit by the door in the draught, or somewhere in the free seats labelled as “a working man,” be felt that he was an alien and outsider, and that he had not paid for his place. He did not wish to deny for a moment that men ought to support public worship, but he did not think it ought to be put in that way; so much theology served over the counter for so much seat-rent. (Hear, hear.) Then it was a fact that there was no practical discipline either in the church or chapel. The working man saw a tyrannical master taking the communion at church, or perhaps the swindling secretary of some company who had defrauded widows and orphans, and brought ruin upon many poor families. These persons were not refused the communion, and were not tabooed as they ought to be. A man might be an adulterer, or a thief, or anything they liked, provided he acted quietly and decorously, dressed well and paid for his seat at church or chapel. (“Hear, hear,” and “No, no.”) He did not mean to say that any body of religionists would sanction these things if they were made known to them, but that they did not trouble themselves to find out whether such things existed or not, and that practically there was no separation between the church and the world. What did men say who were scarcely believers in Christianity at all? They said they saw no difference in the church and out of the church: practically that was the case,

and the reason was because the church did not take the trouble to make difference enough. It was their duty to draw a clear line of demarcation between the world and the religious bodies. It was the duty of every man who was a member of the church, and especially the duty of the leaders, to make the system manifest. He should like to ask for the statistics of persons who had been expelled or refused communion from churches for different offences. Then he wished to say that he thought any monopoly of Christian teaching was a mistake. They should draw in to their aid all the earnest and energetic men who wished to separate Christianity, and in that way they might get a powerful army of auxiliaries. He again claimed indulgence for anything he might have said that appeared to be harsh, assuring the meeting that he accepted Christianity, and believed it to be the true remedy for all the evils of mankind. (Applause.)

The CHAIRMAN: Before I call upon the next speaker, allow me to suggest that our friend who has just spoken has given you precisely the illustration of that to which I adverted in my opening address. You will have to hear a good many things that are painful to yourselves; do not try to put them down,—let them freely come out, and if there are mistakes let them be corrected in due time.

Mr. BATES (engineer) said: The working men had been asked why they did not attend places of worship. There were many reasons why they did not. Some men worked too many hours, and when Sunday came they were glad to get into the country or into the parks for fresh air, believing that they stood more in need of that than of what they got when they went to church or chapel. Others had an objection to going to churches and chapels because they believed that the ministers did not preach or teach Christianity, and they absented themselves for the same reason that they kept away from the shopkeeper who gave short weight and measure and adulterated his things. (“Hear, hear,” and laughter.) If he spoke at all he must speak what he thought. (Hear, hear.) He told them candidly he was one of those who believed that they did give short measure. He believed, too, that priests and parsons had from time immemorial given short weight and short measure and an adulteration of Christianity, or whatever they dealt in, to the working classes. (Hear, hear.) They, therefore, did not want it. Working men had been called all sorts of hard names because they said these things: sometimes they were called atheists, sometimes infidels, sometimes trades’ union demagogues, and so on. They were not atheists—they believed in pure practical Christianity, and if the ministers of religion would teach them a pure, practical, and useful Christianity they would come amongst them and help them with all their might. If, however, it was to be merely a matter of feeling and a matter of believing, they could not see much use in it. They certainly brought up a good set of Sunday-school teachers who were doing a useful service, but with regard to their feelings, their dogmas, and their denunciations, working men saw no good that came from them. If they were to believe in God (as he believed most working men did), they must believe in their own way. They believed that God was good, not bad; that He was the highest conception which men could have of goodness and truth and wisdom. If God was that He could not be the opposite; if He was wise He could not be foolish; if He was true He could not be false; if He was what His name implied He could not be a devil, and was what many religionists made Him. They attributed to Him all the bad faults they found in themselves, and all the evil passions of human nature: because they could not reach to God’s purity they dragged Him down to a level with themselves. Working men did not want such stuff. They would have no more of it. Christianity, in his opinion, was the work of God; Jesus Christ was the Son of God. God was his Father, as He was our Father, and Jesus Christ must be like His Father. He wished to know what society was based upon at the present time. Was there any unity of interest between the different classes, or even any unity of feeling? Society was based upon selfishness and greediness with which the prevailing forms of Christianity did not interfere. He was an Odd Fellow, and one of the fundamental principles of that society was “You shall neither wrong a brother, nor see him wronged.” Ought not Christianity to go higher than Odd Fellowship? Were they prepared to go into the practical part of the matter, and to dig down to the foundations of society and see upon what it rested, and if it was wrong to alter it? Were they prepared to use their education and influence in bringing about a unity of interests between class and class; to alter the relations between capital and labour, and to enable the working man to rise to his legitimate position? Why should not the working man have time to be educated? He would be educated if the Mammon spirit of the age did not prevent it. Because he was not educated he was called all manner of hard names—brutish, drunken, vile, venal, and so on. Would they try to alter that and bring about a system of co-operation in which the interest of one man should be the interest of all? Christianity was wide enough for all this, and more, and if clergymen would only be honest enough to help to bring about this state of things, they would not have to ask the working men why they did not go to their churches and chapels. (Applause.)

The Rev. NEWMAN HALL spoke as follows:—

This of course, is not an occasion for making a speech, but only for a spontaneous utterance of one’s thoughts. Let me say, as having been connected with my friend,

Mr. White, from the commencement of the preparations for this Conference, though the scheme is strictly his, our desires are already accomplished in the outspoken utterances of our friends who have given us their opinions. The earnest desire of all connected with the Conference is to have a most frank and full expression of thought by our brethren of the working classes, as to their reasons for non-attendance at our churches and chapels. We honestly wish to do them good, to show them that we are their brethren, to get them to love us as brethren; and we are honestly grieved if we see any class of the community holding aloof from what we feel would be an infinite benefit to them. Though we may think that some of their objections may be untrue, we want to know what those objections are; and I trust that, as the result of this Conference we may be able to amend some of our ways, and that our brethren of the working classes may be led to modify some of their opinions. I have been thrown among working men during the whole of my public life, and I have long lamented that so many of them are without the organisations of Christianity. By no means would I say that they repudiate Christianity itself. I have met with many working men who do not attend churches and chapels, but who have a reverence for God and for Christianity, and I am more and more persuaded that there must be something wrong in our methods which keeps so many away from us. It is not Christianity itself. When it is remembered that the Founder of our religion was a working man; that He wrought with His own hands with adze or hammer and nail; that He honoured labour in His own practice; that He always advocated the cause of the poor; that He denounced the scribes and pharisees, hypocrites and tyrants; that all His teaching was based on the great principles of unity and love; and when we see the tendency of this religion to elevate every one who embraces it, to give wisdom to the foolish, comfort to the afflicted, and nobleness even to the slave, it seems utterly impossible that any working man can examine it without feeling that if it is a religion for the rich and great it is eminently a religion for the working classes and the poor. (Hear, hear.) Some of the objections that we hear are of a political nature. It is said that religion is too much mixed up with politics. One might expect that those of our brethren who objected to the union of Church and State would flock to the places where the union is protested against; but that is not the fact: therefore that objection does not keep them away. Then with regard to seats in churches: I know some churches that are perfectly open; I know some churches which are occupied on some occasions by those who are said to be the proprietors of the pews, but which are perfectly free on other occasions; yet working men do not avail themselves of the opportunity. I know one case in which a church was established by working men who came to a unanimous vote that half the church should be appropriated and let out, because they liked to have their own individual seats. Then we sometimes hear the objection that ministers are paid. I have a long letter in my pocket in which the writer says that all persons are hirelings because they are paid. I wrote in reply, "You are a working man, and I suppose receive wages; are you a hireling?" People must live. I know many who devote themselves to the ministry, who, if they were seeking money, might make ten or twenty times as much as their salaries in other occupations. I know many, too, who devote half their time to work for which they do not receive an additional penny. I do not find working men who work over time without over pay. (Hear, hear.) Now what are the real objections? I think they are of a very practical kind. I think that often the self-indulgence of the working classes themselves keeps them away from places of worship. I am thankful that our brethren have told us our faults; let me frankly tell them theirs. (Hear, hear.) The working classes of this country spend fifty millions a year in strong drink. If they object to pay 3d. a week for seat rent, they do not object to spend 6d. a day for drink. That is one great reason that keeps people from the House of God. One cure for that is by ministers plunging into the great vortex, and endeavouring to stop the evil by their own example of self-denial and earnestness. It seems as if everything was done to make the working men degraded. At every corner at every street these places are put up, with all that can make them attractive, leading men body and soul to ruin. Another great evil that keeps men from houses of worship is the degrading amusements in which they indulge. The Christian church is doing very little in the way of amusing people, only occupying their attention one day in the week; while those whose only object is gain pander to the lowest tastes of the people to make their occupation the more profitable. We all want play as well as work, and if the only play provided for the working classes is that which is calculated to lower their morals and their intellect, we are not so much surprised that they have not a taste for religious organisations. Then many feel very strange in places of worship, thinking that they are not welcome. Complaints are made that they go to the parks. I say, Let religious men go after them, and preach to them. (Hear, hear.) I should never desire a more attentive congregation. If anybody the worse for liquor should interrupt, the working people themselves would stand by the preacher who is trying to do them good. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. WHITEHORN (engineer) said he understood the question before the meeting to be, What were the causes that prevented working men from attending religious institutions? One reason was that they believed themselves to have been almost from time immemorial the victims both of religious and political institutions; and now they wished to take the matter into their own hands. For the old motto, "Know thyself," they wished to substitute "Be thyself": acting upon which they would do their own thinking, and would stand in no need of ministers. They were told, however, that they must be "converted" before they could get to heaven, notwithstanding their being good fathers, brothers, mothers, and daughters. But working men, when they saw others who were said to be "converted," were apt to think that they wanted to go through the same process again, for they needed occasional patching up. The only difference in them was that they had a graver face: they were not more honest and upright in their daily lives and occupations. The highest attributes of the working man had been trifled with and per-

verted—the gift of reason and the reverence for goodness and truth. Instead of being directed to the teaching of Christ respecting brotherly love, their feelings of reverence were invoked towards objects below them, animate or inanimate—to forms, ceremonies, books, and clothing. In heathen nations men often bowed down to the most hideous-looking objects. And why? Because their priesthoods perverted their feelings of reverence, and associated them with those objects. In Egypt they had their holy onions and leeks, crocodiles and spiders, and any insult to these would have been warmly resented. Moses lifted up his voice against those things, but only to turn the feeling of reverence into another channel, towards times and seasons, forms and ceremonies. The Holy of holies was but a wooden box called the ark, to look into which caused the death of many. Men were sacrificed to these senseless things, instead of being directed to that brotherly love which constituted the very essence of Christ's teaching, and which would prevent wars, drunkenness, sensuality, and every form of evil. Christ protested against all this, and explained the true principle of worship. He told the woman of Samaria that God was not worshipped on this mountain nor on that, but must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. But Christ was put to death because He taught these things and spoke against the priesthood. Nor was there any amendment now. People were bound up in their holy crosses, their holy wafers, and consecrated garments—times, seasons, books, and so on; and the moment a man tried to break away from these trammels he was persecuted by his fellows. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. SWINDLEHURST, an engineer, thought the present Conference was a step in the right direction, and might lead to important results. In looking over the names of the persons who projected the Conference he found that there were men in connection with the Established Church and with Dissenting bodies. That was a step in the right direction; another barrier was broken down. There were thousands of intelligent working men who believed that the social position of the Church was rotten to its very core. Some of their bishops were receiving 10,000/- a-year; they would tell working men in their sermons to imitate Christ, and if they did not try to imitate Christ themselves they were living shams. Truth was of no value unless it was developed in daily life, and if that was done the bishop would have to pay his poor starving curate a little better. He saw a placard on his way to the meeting which was very *apropos*—"Fat oxen and starving people! Fat oxen taken from the glass palace to feed the rich. The poor are in their crowded fever dens being fed by disease." It was an alarming fact, and he maintained that if the ministers of the Gospel belonging to every Christian church had done their duty there would not be so many starving poor. (Hear, hear.) The social condition of the Church was opposed to the true principles of Christianity. There were Lord Chancellors, whether moral or immoral men, who had the power of giving livings for political corruption. Working men knew it, and so long as such a system was maintained they would not support it. 5,700 livings were in the hands of the nobility and clergy in connection with the Established Church; some of the men holding these livings would frequent horse-racing, prize-fighting, and everything immoral and bad, and yet those men held the ministers of the Church in their hands. ("Too true!") Mr. Newman Hall had spoken of working men getting drunk. That was true, but their legislators had made working men what they were. (Hear, hear.) They had licensed 160,000 public-houses, to stand in every street-corner on purpose to tempt the people, and not only that, but they were realising every year 25,000,000/- of blood-money in the form of revenue upon misery, wretchedness, disease, and death. Ministers of the Gospel had always been the greatest opponents of the temperance movement. Thousands of teetotalers from various parts of the country would not go to their various churches and chapels because ministers of the Gospel opposed the movement. Temperance was inseparable from true Christianity, and if ministers of the Gospel came out and aided working men in connection with their social institutions the social evils that now afflicted society would soon be removed.

Mr. JOHN M'GREGOR said there was a great distinction between attention to religion and attendance on church. He had had the pleasure and privilege of a good deal of intercourse with his fellow men in the open air. If those who were managing the churches and chapels would consider that a church had got two purposes—that of serving for a regular place of worship for a congregation, and also a public place in which the truth might be preached to the masses, they might get a larger body of men into their ranks. If St. Paul's Cathedral was opened many working men would not come in; but if the same minister came out to them and convinced them that he was only coming to speak concerning their welfare, he would have attentive listeners. He had addressed large crowds in the open air near King's-cross, but he could not get those men into any enclosed place to listen. He had seen, on Tower-hill, a number of people who would not go inside of the railings, though they were only three feet high, but would lean over the railings to listen to the preaching going on inside. They seemed as if they would not step over a chalk line, because they felt that by attaching themselves to a certain body in a particular way they were engaging, perhaps against their light and conscience, in an act of worship with those people. He felt, therefore, that clergymen and ministers, who knew religion to be the greatest thing for men, ought to go and carry it to those outside, and convince them that they were anxious for their welfare, and then say, "Come you inside our church and worship." But to expect these men, who were

wandering about the streets, conversing with great fluency and great power, with great desires and with great responsibility, to go into their churches and sit down for a long time, and then to kneel down and rise up, to be part and parcel of the congregation, was highly unreasonable. He did not wish to say that either side was free from blame; but it would be wrong to say that the working man was to abstain from Christianity till he could get a perfect preacher perfect in relation to qualities, to social life, or in the freedom with which he could denounce from the pulpit the sins of all classes of his congregation. But when working men told them so boldly as they had done that the religion was not what they objected to so much as the manner in which it was put before them, a good deal would be learnt, and he should learn much himself.

Mr. GREEN (plasterer) said it must be admitted that the working classes desired to be honest as far as they could in their dealings and opinions. He thought the key-note of the indifference, or the alleged indifference, of the working classes to religious teaching was struck by the Rev. Newman Hall when he said that Christianity ennobled the slave. The teaching of Christianity was that a slave and it could not exist together. That was precisely one of the points on which religious teaching failed. He did not say that it was wrong to teach a man patience under adversity, but Christianity, or rather the Christianity that was taught, taught a man to be perfectly satisfied with the condition in which he was placed, and to be patient under it, whilst at the same time it taught him that it was his duty and his privilege to rise to something better. He could conceive that there was extreme difficulty felt by gentlemen of high education in intimately associating with those who had little or no education, who could not talk to them in a familiar manner upon common topics. That placed a barrier between the clergyman and the working man. How was that barrier to be removed? If a clergyman was sent as a missionary amongst savages, what did he do? Why, he worked along with the people whom he was sent to convert; he cast aside entirely all his gentility, and became along with them a practical working man. Now they had in this country a highly-trained class of gentlemen who made religion a profession. That was at the bottom of the whole evil. (Hear, hear.) He did not say that because the working men were not in attendance upon Christian churches that they were not Christians, but it was one of the principal reasons why the clergy did not obtain hearers that they were not familiar enough with those whom they wished to listen to them, and they were divided amongst themselves into sects and classes. There were numbers of gentlemen of one religious persuasion who would not associate with those of another, and there were very few professors of religion who in any way attempted to carry their teaching into practice. He believed he was speaking the truth when, speaking broadly, he said that there was only one class of professors of religion who really and truly attempted to act up to what they taught. He meant the Quakers. (Laughter.) That body presented a perfect example of what Christians ought to be. Possibly, even they themselves, being human beings, were not perfect. (Renewed laughter.) They stood on a more intimate footing of equality amongst themselves than any other body of Christians, and what was one of their first principles? Why, that no man or woman should receive the slightest reward for anything they did in the service of the church. They were all in the church perfectly equal. The poorest man might be deputed to take part in some of the most weighty business connected with his church; the only thing that weighed with them was moral worth, and wealth was of no consideration whatever. (Great laughter, "No, no.") He did not mean to say that a Quaker was indifferent to wealth any more than any other person, but in their religious intercourse wealth or money was no subject of consideration. And in theory—he did not know how it might be in actual practice—the richest Quaker was open to be reproved by the poorest in any wrong doing. That body had a perfect theory, at any rate, of what religious teaching should be, and, with regard to the question of the slave, they certainly presented to the world a noble example.

Mr. WYNN, plasterer, said there were deeper causes than those which had been mentioned for the disaffection among the working classes with regard to churches. The sinners who had really given offence were in the room. Science and religion had for a great number of years been considered to be at variance. When he looked at a number of gentlemen around him who had, to a certain extent, disengaged from the established religion of the day, who had advanced in their opinions with regard to geology and other sciences, he did not wonder that working men who had, to a certain extent, intellectually examined the subject, felt a good deal dissatisfied with the Churches already existing. The distinction of classes was another great bar. This was more particularly manifest in country churches. If a working man was invited into one of those churches, he felt that there was an intolerable gulf between the classes, and that it was a mere matter of condescension to recognise him as one of God's people outside the church. Working men had most sympathy with Dissenting chapels, for there was something like equality there. But then they did not know which they were to believe. He had heard Mr. McGregor speaking against Catholicism, whilst the Catholics would defend their own system. Working men say, "Why, whom are we to believe? which of these two principles are we to endorse?" He had heard that stated many, many times. And then when he found a minister in the church stating that the Mosaic

cosmogony was necessarily true, and that Professor Huxley was a heretic, or something worse than a heretic; and on the other hand, heard the Professor or Mr. Ramsay, or some competent searcher of geology or ethnology, dispute the statements made in the church, and saying that the old cosmogony was not to be believed, there was a great source of infidelity. He would frankly state to them that working men had examined these questions extensively. Then again the press were great sinners—of course he excepted those in the room. (Great laughter.) The *Times*, *Dispatch*, "Publicola" and others, were continually telling the working classes that the old system must be abrogated—that the old institution of Moses was no better than that of Lycurgus. There was something strange in all this, and working men's minds were disturbed, they did not know whom to believe. Scientific men told them they must ignore the old dispensation, that the Bible did not necessarily teach science, that it apparently appeared at variance with what was called religion. He hoped they would not consider that he had been talking dangerous infidelity, because he was no infidel. He was not an infidel to that which appeared to him to be true. (Great laughter.) This was the first opportunity he had seen the working classes and the educated classes brought face to face for the purpose of ventilating their sentiments on these questions and being frank with one another. He would tell them what was wanted, and that was a counter-attraction to the casino, the public-house, the Canterbury and the Oxford. They had not yet presented that attraction, and when clergymen would condescend to go into philosophic institutions and deliver lectures on the various sciences of the day, it was highly probable that the working classes would be found anxious to listen, and the common bond of sympathy would be more strongly cemented in that way than in any other.

Mr. BURNINGSTORF, a bookseller's porter, and who described himself as lately a costermonger, said the indifference of working men to public worship was owing, in great measure, to their early training. There were thousands of boys and girls who never entered a Sunday-school, but looked upon the day as one of liberty and pleasure. It could hardly be expected that men so brought up would care much for religious instruction. But those who had attended Sunday-schools often refrained from attending places of worship, and was it to be wondered at when they saw the railways, steamboats, and omnibuses plying for passengers, and the shops open on Sunday, that the lessons taught in their early days were forgotten, or if remembered at all, were remembered only as a sort of antiquated, straitlaced notions, quite out of keeping with modern times, whilst they looked upon going to church or chapel as a sort of respectable or fashionable hypocrisy which they considered themselves too manly or too honest to be guilty of. Others had to work so hard at their daily toil, that they were compelled to remain part of the Sabbath-day in bed, and there was another class who knew no Sabbath, who not only toiled six days in the week, but were compelled also to toil on the Sunday. That state of things was a disgrace to a Christian land, for no man had a right to rob another of his Sabbath—(applause)—even though it might be to take his fellow-man into the country to breathe the air. There were another class of men whose earnings were very small. That Conference, he believed, averaged 25s. a-week. A man who had a wife and family to support would find it quite impossible to dress himself, children, and wife in clothing sufficiently decent to attend public worship, in fact, the present price of provisions and rent the money would not buy the commonest necessaries. Therefore the wife was often compelled to assist the husband with her labour, and her own household work was put off till Saturday night or Sunday before it could be performed. Then again there were men whose incomes were sufficient to send them to church or chapel decently clothed, but who were cursed with dirty slatternly wives who put off their work to the end of the week, and the Sunday, which ought to be to the working man a day of peace and rest, was turned into a day of turmoil and confusion. Thus these men were driven to spend the Sunday at the street-corner or the public-house. Then drinking customs were the greatest enemies to religion, and they alone kept a whole army of their working men from their churches and chapels. But, notwithstanding all these obstacles there were a large number who might go to church if they would. Why did not they? Because whenever they attempted to go they were made to feel more like intruders than welcome guests. Sometimes they were kept standing for a length of time, or sometimes there were forms or pews set apart for the working classes, and on purpose that there should be no mistake on the subject, he had seen the words, "Free seats for the poor" painted upon them, thus pauperising every occupier of those seats. He had known working men suffer the greatest possible distress and destitution rather than apply to the parish, and if they would suffer that, was it to be supposed that they would go to a church or a chapel to be thus degraded? No, indeed, they would not. Another great cause of alienation was the fact that the minister was rarely ever seen in the homes of the poor, and it was a common saying amongst them that if they wanted to see the parson they must wait till Sunday, and they would not always see him then. He would recommend all ministers of religion to set aside their little differences of creed, and to join in some plan by which their parishes might be divided into districts, and let the ministers in the parish visit each district alternately. If they were unable to spare the time, let it be done by representatives. Ladies would be most acceptable; let them come, not

as patrons or superiors, but as one loving sister would go to the home of another, showing that they had their welfare at heart, and they would soon win love and esteem.

The Rev. Dr. MILLER said he felt under the deepest obligation to the chairman for the address with which the meeting was opened. (Hear, hear.) He should not be suspected of unduly complimenting Mr. Miall when he stated that anything more apposite to the occasion or better calculated to throw their deliberations into a right form could not have been penned. They were not there to pass resolutions, but if he could anticipate that any verdict would be returned as the result of the Conference, it would be the verdict that always passed in his mind when he saw a man and his wife quarrelling, and that was that there were faults on both sides. The working men had hit them pretty hard, and they must bear that he should be as outspoken in return. There was one proverb they would have done well to bear in mind, and that was that when they gave a dog a bad name they hung him. A great many of the faults that had been pointed out existed a few years ago, but did not exist now. While listening to the admirable address of the last speaker, he could not help feeling, "Where do you live? Who is your parish clergyman? Is not the very thing that you are depicting going on in hundreds and thousands of parishes throughout this land? Are not these very Christian Sisters of Mercy going up and down among the homes of the people? and is not the clergyman visiting his people either in his own person or in the person of those who are about him, diligent every day?" Therefore, he thought their working friends should bear in mind that with regard to many practical and theoretical abuses, they were in a rapid process of disappearing. With regard to the abuses connected with the Church of England from its political connection, there could be no doubt there was a great deal of truth in what had been stated. There was no working man who would speak more strongly on what he did not hesitate to call the *accursed* system—he used the word deliberately—of selling livings that he could. (Applause.) He could not face a people if he felt he had bought them, and the working classes should bear in mind that many others felt as he did. He believed if they were to poll the clergy of the Church of England they would not find fifty who would not hold up their hands against the sale of livings. He did not wish to throw an apple of discord into the meeting, but of course as it was with Christianity itself so it was with their religious organisations, and a good many men were indisposed to attend at public worship, and were glad to find any pretext for neglecting public worship. A man would not say to himself, "No; I am indifferent about eternity and about my soul"—he would not say, "I prefer lying in bed or lounging in the street or reading the newspaper," but, "Cannot I pick a fault in the parson or somebody that goes there?" He did not say that was the case with all his working friends. He had lived among the working classes of a very large district for a great many years, and had a great deal to do with them, and was certain that in many cases the excuse put forward was a pretext. Then he would tell them another thing in which he thought they made a mistake. They accused the clergy—and he thought very justly, though he hoped the clergymen of England were getting out of the rut as fast as they could—of looking at things from their own standpoint and being narrow-minded. They must remember that that applied to working men as well as to themselves. They demanded that persons and religious professors should be perfect; but it was a very unreasonable demand. Though the inconsistencies of clergymen and professors were to be deplored, that was no reason why a man should stop away from church. He did not suppose any man would refuse to accept the gift of a bank-note because he knew there were some false ones in circulation. Some allusion had been made to politics. It was generally thought, though it did not happen to be his lot, that all the Church of England parsons were Tories. He was not, and never was, though he did not know if that was at all to his credit. They said, "If you would join with us and seek to get us our political rights, we should love you better, and we would go to your churches." Did a working man consider what would be the effect of a clergyman in a parish becoming a political partisan? It must be remembered that if on the one hand there were a great many Liberals in his parish, there were also a great many on the other side, and he would ask any sensible working man in the room whether it was the business of a clergyman so to identify himself with political parties in the State as not only to lose his influence with half his people, but probably to excite the most bitter feelings against himself. He did not part with his rights as an Englishman because he was a clergyman, but was content to hold everything in abeyance rather than peril his spiritual influence with his people. Then there was another thing with regard to science. There was a great deal of truth in what had been stated, and it was a great pity that any religious man should ever put the question as if there could be really any variance between science and true religion. The thing was out of the question. The same God that wrote the Bible made the world, and God was one, truth was one. But the working man misunderstood their truth altogether; it was not that Moses and science were at variance. When a man of science said to him, "You are wrong," he did one of two things. He said, "Let me be quite sure that Professor Huxley is right first"; and if he was quite sure that he was right, then he would say, "Let me be quite sure that my interpretation of the Bible must be looked to, because it is quite possible that

my interpretation of the Bible may be wrong." The Bible, and his interpretation of it, were two very different things; truth and his version of it were two very different things indeed. Then there was another point on which they were all grievously mistaken. If they imagined that ministers of religion had no sympathy with the working classes, they never made a greater mistake in their lives. There was a most intense sympathy in the hearts of many ministers of religion towards them, and it had been carried to excess, so that they had been in danger of petting and pampering the working man because they had developed that sympathy in a somewhat erroneous direction. For mercy's sake let them not go away and imagine that there was no sympathy existing towards them. There was a strong feeling about the wealth of the clergy in connection with the Establishment. Now it was an absolute truth that the clergy of the Church of England took as much money into the Church of England as they ever carried out of it. He had said to the working men in Birmingham over and over again, that there were thousands of working men in the midland districts who were better off than any curate and a great many incumbents in the Church of England. (Applause.)

Mr. GEORGE POTTER said he agreed with a great deal that had fallen from Dr. Miller. Being connected very much with the working classes, and having their social and political advancement at stake and at heart, he had also their religious advancement and interest at heart. He had not only endeavoured by his actions and work to ameliorate their social condition and to advance them to that political position in the country which they were entitled to, but had endeavoured by his life to carry out in practice that Gospel and religion which he professed. He rejoiced at this Conference, and had no doubt great good would result from it. He had asked many working men since the Conference was proposed, what were the reasons that kept them from places of worship, and had received very many answers. One said it was on account of the numerous creeds that were advocated and taught; but his answer was, "Well, I am sorry that creeds should exist; there is but one Gospel, no matter how many creeds—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." That Gospel is this, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Then he would say to that man, "That Gospel is preached in hundreds of places of worship plain and simple, true and noble, and to that place such a one as you should go." Then he had asked another, and he had said that the best seats were given to the rich and the poor seats to the poor. He did not know how that applied to the Established Church, but in Nonconformist chapels the minister had to be sustained out of what he got by the seats being let; he was worthy of his hire and should be supported by the Gospel which he preached. But they were always able to find seats for the poorest of working men in places where they could bear and where they could get good if they would come. Another said it was because ministers of the Gospel did not co-operate with them in their social and political questions. There was a good deal of truth and point in that. He knew that many ministers were only seen once a week, and that was in the pulpit, but they did not co-operate socially with the working classes on many of the questions that so vitally affected them. He did not say that they ought to come and interfere between trades unions and strikes and employers, but their sympathies were always with the employers and seldom with the employed. ("Hear, hear," and "No, no.") It was a rule. There were noble exceptions, such as Newman Hall, Samuel Martin, and many more that he could name, but as a rule their sympathies were with the employers. Much was lost by this conduct of the Christian teachers and preachers. Let them come amongst them. It was not always safe, perhaps, to meddle politically with their questions, but let them look at their social position, at their homes, their long hours of labour, their low wages, and at the innumerable evils under which they existed, and which they were alone left to grapple with. The voice of the minister at their meetings would draw together diverging interests, would conciliate parties, and would show that he sympathised with the great truth and doctrine he preached, that He who founded that doctrine wished and intended the working classes to have a sphere and position in this world as Christians, not as beasts of burden. There were minor causes, but the great cause why working men did not attend religious places of worship was carelessness and indifference. This had been to him a great cause of regret. Working men did not reject the Gospel as a rule, they only neglected it, though in both cases it was fatal to them. One good resulting from this Conference would be that the attention of working men would be drawn to the question, and many would begin to ask what it was that kept them away from a place of worship. It was lolling on the sofa, no doubt, to many. But they required it. Look at the long hours of labour in many of their trades—shoemakers, tailors, shopmen who laboured till twelve o'clock at night, retiring to bed on Sunday morning at one or two o'clock, more exhausted than beasts of burden. They asked those men to come up at nine o'clock to

(Continued in the body of the paper.)